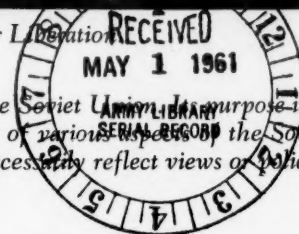


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THE SOVIET FARM EXODUS

It appears that the flight of young people from the Soviet farms has recently grown to alarming proportions, if dire warnings in the press are its reflection. In a few months' time, a leading Soviet youth publication has discussed the problem in more than 30 articles and letters.

Judging by the turnover of personnel--a symptom of this youthful population movement--the Virgin Lands Territory is the foremost problem child of the Soviet rural areas.

Another expression of the exodus of youth from farms is urbanization, a process which has been thinning the ranks of agricultural workers. Statistics show that massive use of manpower is needed in the Soviet Union if its leaders want to catch up with the productivity of the United States.

The reasons for the massive desertions of youth from the kolkhozes and sovkhoses include low earning power, primitive working conditions, lack of the most ordinary amenities and conveniences--physical and cultural--and the bleakness of any educational prospects.

The authorities are now waging a campaign to get city youth to work in the country, and steps are being taken to prevent young persons from leaving the rural areas, but it is clear that the Soviet leaders will have to undertake more serious measures to solve the problem of rural manpower.

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No. 30, 1960/61

THE SOVIET FARM EXODUS

Numerous articles in the current Soviet press reveal that one of the main reasons for the chronic crisis in agriculture is the refusal of young people to put up with the hardships and boredom of Soviet rural life. Especially in recent months, the Soviet press has been sounding a continual alarm about the defection of young persons from the kolkhozes. The newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda alone has devoted more than thirty articles and letters to the desertions and the ensuing shortage of manpower. For instance, an article in the March 14 issue of the Soviet youth organ noted that

Recently the Komsomol regional committee in Gorky discovered 120 Komsomol members, trained in agriculture, who were not working at the jobs for which they had been trained...; every morning, agronomists who have not grown one ear of grain, agricultural experts who have seen cows only from a distance, and machine operators who have never driven a tractor hurry to factories and offices in town, sit at desks, work behind the counter, sell tickets on the buses.

The situation on the virgin lands is even worse. In a speech at Tselinograd, Khrushchev complained that "while 24,000 specialists have been sent to the virgin lands of Kazakhstan during the last three years, 14,000 have left these regions" (Izvestia, March 19, 1961). Few of the young persons who helped develop the virgin lands in 1954 have remained there. The January 1961 Central Committee Plenum brought out that the main problem in the virgin lands was manpower turnover. The December 1958 plenum decreed that all field work on the virginlands was to be done without the recruitment of cadres from other republics. However, the virgin lands have not been able to build up their own permanent cadres. Field work, particularly harvesting, when done with imported labor, is of lower quality than when done by the settled labor.

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An important socio-economic development in the Soviet Union is that it is now undergoing a process of urbanization. Of more than 100,000,000 inhabitants in predominantly rural areas, only one quarter work on the farms, which do not have the necessary labor to ensure a normal growth of agricultural output. Under a free economy the number of persons on farms in the USSR would be ample. The sovkhozes, kolkhozes, repair-and-tractor stations, and the remaining machine-and-tractor stations employed 28,800,000 persons in 1959, according to Statisticheskyy Sbornik Po Selskomu Khozyaistvu (Statistical Compilation on Agriculture, Moscow, 1960), while in the United States there were only 8,000,000 farmers, members of their families and hired workers in 1957, including persons engaged in forestry, hunting and fishing (Statistisches Jahrbuch, Statistical Yearbook, Wiesbaden, 1959). A comparison of yields in the two countries reveals some startling differences in output (Izvestia, March 8, 1961):

	USSR	U. S. A.
Total sown area (million hectares).....	119.7	88.3
Gross grain crop (million metric tons).....	125.9	170.2
Average winter and spring wheat crop (metric tons per hectare).....	1.2	1.8
Average potato crop (metric tons per hectare).....	9.1	20.1
Cattle (million head).....	74.0	93.9
Output of meat (million tons).....	8.9	17.9

The United States, it appears, has a much greater output than the USSR with fewer than one third of the workers employed in agriculture. The 1960 Sbornik states that "labor productivity in agriculture in the Soviet Union is about one third of that of the United States" (p. 89). The shortcomings of Soviet agriculture are thus caused not by a shortage of manpower, but by the negative attitude of the kolkhoz workers. Labor productivity has always been low on the kolkhozes. In October 1953, a law on the legal responsibility of the kolkhozniki for failure to fulfill plans was rescinded and labor productivity became even lower than before. A further problem today is that the first generation of kolkhozniki is now middle-aged and young replacements are needed. The present mechanization of agriculture means that more workers

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with technical training will be required, and these can be supplied only by the younger generation.

A careful reading of the Soviet press unearths the main reasons for the mass desertion of youth from the country. One such reason is the low earning power of the kolkhoz workers. Even on the comparatively prosperous kolkhozes the kolkhoznik spends only part of the day working for the kolkhoz and has to work on his own plot of land to earn a living. An article, "What Does the Millionaire Lack," in Komsomolskaya Pravda of November 18, 1960, notes:

... In families with few able-bodied persons or where all the members of the family do not work... people cling to their private plot of land, which takes up a lot of time. A person could completely devote himself to kolkhoz work, but he has to keep one eye on the side. That is why a wife says to her husband: "You go and work on the kolkhoz, while I breed a couple of hogs, slaughter and sell them on the market and earn more than you."

The second reason for the desertions is the difficult working conditions, particularly in the breeding of livestock. As the Soviet press itself admits, the only mechanization found in livestock breeding is to be seen at the expositions. On the farms, all tasks are done by hand. Work goes on from dawn to dusk to meet quotas. The article "Why Only Five of Us Are Left?" (ibid., December 17, 1961) describes farm work as follows:

Take our kolkhoz. My classmate, Katya Kuzmenko, milks 20 cows. Everything is done by hand on the farm. Katya is rarely ever at home. Marusya Shcherbina works from dawn to dusk in the pigsty.... I clean the manure with a spade, load the fodder with my hands onto the cart, carry it about by hand, and distribute the load in the feeding boxes by hand. Today I got up at 5 o'clock. I had to walk two kilometers (1.25 miles) to the farm. I finished at 8 in the evening, and then had to walk two kilometers again to get home...

A further reason for the dissatisfied rural youth is the lack on the kolkhozes of the most ordinary amenities and conveniences--physical and cultural--in comparison with the facilities available in the city. One young Soviet writer, D. Kholendro, complained that

If a young person devotes all his knowledge
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only to the cowshed or pigsty,, he gradually loses interest in life, begins to drag, and the work itself becomes a burden for him. The scope of life is much broader. (ibid., February 1, 1961).

A further reason for the mass movement of youth from rural areas is the lack of any prospects, particularly the absence of opportunity for further study. Young persons living in the country are finding it more and more difficult to enter the higher educational establishments. The secretary of the Kuibishev Komsomol oblast committee stated that persons from the local kolkhozes accounted for only a very small percentage of the first-year students at the higher educational establishments. Komsomolskaya Pravda declared on March 30, 1961, that

In the first course at the medical institute, there were 350 students, including 39 from rural areas. Yet they were only nominally from the country. Most of them have no idea what plowed-up land looks like. They are, as a rule, persons from the regional centers, the children of doctors, workers in the oil-prospecting offices and regional establishments. Only one was admitted to the institute on the recommendation of a kolkhoz.

The number of students from the families of workers and salaried employees in urban areas has apparently been increasing, and there are even fewer students from rural areas than before.

The authorities are now waging a vigorous campaign to mobilize city youth for work on the farms. Steps are being taken also to prevent young persons from leaving the rural areas. According to a decision of the ninth Komsomol plenary session (ibid., February 11, 1961), a further "500,000 to 600,000 young persons are to be sent on Komsomol passes for work in livestock breeding areas this year." About 15,000 young builders, thousands of machine operators, doctors, teachers and other young specialists are being mobilized for the virgin lands. The Party, the Komsomol, and the trade-unions are taking part in the campaign. Khrushchev devoted much space to the problem of manpower supply during his six-week tour of agricultural regions. But it is clear that the Soviet leaders will have to undertake more serious measures to solve the problem of rural manpower.